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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum was to increase homework productivity and reinforce basic skills in a third-grade class. Other objectives were to relieve the burden of parents who were unable to help their children with homework and to improve communication between parent, teacher, and child. Homework assignments were made daily by the teacher. Children were given 30 minutes every school day to complete their homework. They were able to seek the aid of the teacher, use the library, and work in cooperative groups in order to complete the task. Children were tested weekly to determine whether homework completion had led to basic skills improvement. Parents received information about test scores every 2 weeks. Results of the practicum were positive. Homework productivity increased sharply, and weekly testing showed increased knowledge in the areas reinforced by homework completion. Unexpected outcomes revealed the development of self-esteem, and mutual admiration and respect. On-site homework completion gave children time to engage in more leisure time reading. Parents were happy with positive feedback regarding homework completion, and children received positive and meaningful communication from parents. It is recommended that educators examine new approaches to the problems related to traditional homework assignments. A list of 13 references and related materials is appended. (GLR)

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Increasing Homework Productivity in Third Grade Through On-Site Supervision

by

Myra S. Locke

Cluster XXXVIII

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
In Child and Youth Studies in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

1991

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This practicum took place as described.

Verifier:

Camille C. King

Camille King

Principal of Coral Park Elementary

Title
Miami, Florida

Address

May 31,1991
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Myra S. Locke under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Jan 15, 1992
Date of Final Approval of Report

Roberta L. Schomburg
Roberta Schomburg, Ph.D.
Advisor

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Roberta Schomburg, who was always there with encouraging words, advice and a friendly comment, especially when things became hectic and words were slow in coming.

ABSTRACT

Increasing Homework Productivity in Third Grade Through On-Site Supervision. Myra S. Locke., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Homework Stress/Parent, Teacher Communication/Learning Strategies/Parent, Child Communication.

The purpose of this practicum was to increase homework productivity in third grade, while reinforcing basic skills. Other objectives were to relieve the burden from parents who were unable to help their children with homework and to improve communication between parent, teacher and child.

Homework assignments were made daily by the teacher. Time was allotted for children to complete their homework in school. The children were able to seek the aid of the teacher and use the library if necessary. Children were able to work in cooperative groups in order to complete the task. Testing was done at the end of each week to see if completing homework assignments led to improvement in the areas of basic skills. Communication was conducted every two weeks to provide parents with information about test scores.

Results of this practicum were positive. Homework productivity increased sharply. Weekly testing did show increased knowledge in the areas reinforced by homework completion. Parents were happy with positive feedback regarding homework completion. Unexpected outcomes revealed the development of self-esteem, mutual admiration and respect for one another by working in cooperative groups. On-site homework completion allowed children time to engage in more leisure-time reading. Children were the recipients of positive and meaningful communication from parents.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum was carried out in a third-grade classroom that was part of an elementary school which included kindergarten through grade five. Twenty-three children received help in homework completion.

The school is located in a community of privately-owned homes and several small apartment complexes. These domiciles are inhabited by middle-class families representing both blue- and white-collar workers.

The school is thirty years old and serves approximately seven hundred thirty children. It was built to serve a community that began thirty-four years ago. It stands on landfill that was once part of a great wildlife preservation area.

For many years the school served an ethnic community of American-born families, who came from all parts of the United States. There were some Hispanic families but they were few and had been in the area for some time. In the late 1950's the entire city underwent a population change when the political situation in the Caribbean became explosive. This political upheaval became the major cause of a tremendous surge of Hispanic immigration. These developments had considerable impact on the nation, the city, and the immediate community.

After several years, American families began an exodus from the area and they were replaced by Hispanic families. In 1972 a state university was built within two miles of the school, bringing to this area students and faculty from all over the world. All of this growth and development brought further changes to the school population. Boundary changes for attendance were extended into an area densely populated by people fleeing the political situation in Central America.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

This practicum class included nine children of Cuban-American heritage, and nine from the countries of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras. There were two children from South America; one child from Korea and two children whose parents were American-born and did not consider themselves "hyphenated Americans."

Although people from Central America, Cuba and South America are all considered Hispanic, there are many cultural differences and strained relationships that exist among them.

The children from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras are of Indian-European ancestry. The parents of these children have little education, speak mostly Spanish and very poor English. They are hard-working people who entered this country as political

refugees. Many hold low-paying jobs due to a lack of skills. The main priority for these families is to provide food and shelter for their children. However, many of these families realize that a good education is of fundamental importance for the next generation.

The families from South America and Cuba have a more extensive education and they speak English or are striving to improve their language skills. These people own their own businesses or work at better-paying jobs. In general, the South Americans came here for economic reasons while the Cubans immigrated for political reasons. Priorities among these people include a good education for their children.

The Korean child has parents who are students at the University. This Korean family holds education in the highest regard, (the child's grandfather is a principal of an elementary school in Korea). They speak limited English but work very hard at trying to improve their skills. The priority for this family is for their child to receive the best education possible. The child works very hard to achieve the goals set by the family and the school.

The two American children in this class have parents who are proficient in English, enjoy the richness of cultural exchange provided by this multi-cultural community, and appreciate the opportunity to learn another language.

The writer serves this diverse class as both teacher and facilitator. She also serves as the reading resource teacher for the faculty in this school.

The writer strives for close communication between herself, parents of her students and other students in the school. Effort is made to retain a closeness to former students within the school as well as those who have progressed to other schools in the immediate feeder pattern.

It is not unusual in this classroom for former students to drop in to say hello and explain to the children how they are progressing in their new classes. They also tell the third-graders how important it is for them to learn their lessons well because it will be important to their success in school.

The writer sees herself as an instructor, an advisor, a faciliator, a friend and confidant to students, parents and other teachers.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Description of The Problem

The problem addressed in this practicum was the inability of students in third grade to complete homework assignments on a nightly basis. Many children in third grade arrived at school each day without their homework.

This appeared to be a universal problem. Most teachers felt that parents should become involved in the homework process. Teachers told their students that the parent would be contacted if homework was not turned in. Amid a flurry of note-writing or telephone-calling the teacher made every attempt to notify the parent. Notes did not always reach home and telephones were not always answered. It required a great deal of teacher effort, time and energy to remain in constant contact with parents of children who consistently failed to complete homework assignments.

Some parents who were contacted by teachers often felt coerced or bullied into becoming involved. These parents reacted in different ways. Some, feeling guilty, began to take an active role. They sat for long periods of time working with their children at the dining room table. Quite often they enlisted the entire family, making everyone miserable and unhappy until the

work was finished. Many frustrated parents ended up doing the work themselves, just to get it finished. Too often the parents became so frustrated and tired that they lashed out at the child with negative remarks or unreasonable punishment. The word homework would bring on connotations of torture. Many of these parents would quit in disgust and bail out of the process.

Working parents or a single parent were not always available to see that homework was completed. Many had activities which took them out of the home during the evening hours when homework was typically done. These parents could offer little support.

Despite the good intentions of many parents, they often do not provide the kind of help children need with homework. Parents whose working hours are extended into the evening are unable to help their children with the assignments. Parents who lack proficiency in English are also handicapped when it comes to offering help in the area of language arts instruction. Even though adequate instruction is carried on in the classroom there are many times when children require some additional help at home.

Other parents ignored the situation. Busy with the day-to-day struggles of life such as earning a living, dealing with stress and disappointment, and trying to adjust to a strange and foreign culture, they gave little priority to the importance of homework

completion.

Then there were the parents who shifted the responsibility back to the teacher. These parents asked the teacher to keep the child after school until the homework was completed. This proved to be a poor solution because many children were engaged in after-school activities or were transported by bus or car-pool. Teachers, moreover, have other responsibilities after school and should not be burdened with additional child care.

When a parent is not able to offer help to the child the result is unfinished work, loss of self-esteem and difficulty explaining to the teacher why the work was not completed. Teachers, would often resort to taking the problems to the administrator or sending children to the office to be disciplined. Administrators were not interested in dealing with minor problems such as homework. They felt that it was the responsibility of the teacher to handle these matters.

Teachers ultimately needed to deal with the problem within the confines of the classroom. They gave failing grades to students who did not complete assignments or they took away privileges. Some even gave punishment assignments which further alienated the student and simply increased the amount of work **not** being done. Teacher, parent, and student all suffered anger and frustration but still the problem persisted.

Problem Documentation

The problem was identified as a failure by the students to complete their homework assignments, consistently, on a nightly basis. A survey of the students revealed that homework completion did not take place for a variety of reasons.

In interviews with three other third-grade teachers, the writer found the situation to be the same. One teacher stated that the children came to school without their work and did not particularly care that it had not been done. She further stated that the children were not concerned with doing it when they left the room at the completion of each day. Another teacher spent a great deal of time on the telephone complaining to parents about the lack of homework completion and demanding parental involvement in getting the problem solved. The third teacher claimed that only her highly-motivated students completed the assignments on a nightly basis. She was of the opinion that those children who did not place importance on school success did not see the need to spend valuable free-time doing such tiresome tasks as homework.

The parents of the children in this class were also asked for their input. In a survey sent home to twenty-three parents, eight responded that they were not comfortable working with their child in English. Nine

said that it was an effort to get children to do homework, while seven stated that their child often forgot books and/or assignments. Parents were asked if they felt they needed help in dealing with the homework problem. Of the twenty-three parents surveyed, seventeen stated that they would like to have help in having their children complete their homework.

Parents often appeared to be unaware of problems, and when problems were apparent they were sometimes unwilling to address the issues. Many felt that problems that occurred in the classroom should be handled exclusively by the teacher. Telephone calls to parents were initiated by the writer in order to alert them of problem situations. Often parents were faced with handling problem situations at home but did not realize that the same problem behaviors were sometimes being repeated at school.

Causative Analysis

There appear to be six major causes for the stated problem. The first cause appears to be that children lack the emotional and behavioral skills to complete the assigned tasks. Some children are not encouraged to become independent thinkers until they are older. When parents or grandparents assume the responsibility for making everyday decisions for children, these children

will not learn how to make decisions or solve problems for themselves. Consequently, children who rely on adults when making decisions or solving problems will prolong accepting responsibility for doing homework or other tasks.

Secondly, many parents lack the skills necessary to motivate children to complete their own assignments. These parents assume that homework completion is **their** responsibility and end up doing most or all of it. They will sit with the child for long periods of time over homework. In these cases the child has all the attention he desires and the parent becomes the captive audience.

Homework in these homes becomes a nightly ritual of nagging, procrastination and pleading. It may even take on a nightmarish quality. Many of these parents finally give up in disgust and withdraw all parental support.

The third probable cause for homework problems is that some parents lack the English proficiency necessary to help their children in the area of academic skills. They are unfamiliar with English vocabulary, grammar and spelling, and are unable to do computation or cope with problem-solving in math. When they cannot provide the scholastic help their children need, their children often get frustrated and annoyed with them. Both parents and children in this situation suffer feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Another problem area arises in homes where both parents work or where there is a single parent, and often little supervision. Hard-working parents return home late in the evening, quite often too tired to do anything more than prepare the evening meal and trundle the children off to bed as soon as possible. They need to relax, unwind and forget the stress of dealing with their own day-to-day problems. They are reluctant to deal with homework assignments, checking papers or even talking to children about what occurred in school.

The priority in these homes is not necessarily on education but on providing food and shelter for the family. In these situations children are provided with little motivation or stimulation for doing well in school.

Lack of communication between home and school is another cause of ineffectiveness in homework completion. When parents are not English-proficient and cannot communicate with the teacher, they cannot give their children the help they need. During parent/teacher conferences these parents feel insecure and inadequate. They feel threatened or excluded in the esoteric world of English speakers. In many homes it is felt that education should be left to the school and the educators (Locke & Latham,1984). Children are expected to act like children at home and they are expected to go to school to learn. It is the function of the school and

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The literature reveals that most authors are in agreement about homework as a problem. Smilansky (1990) says parents should focus on being a "family," not on "teaching" children. Children go to **school** to learn. Canter (1987), Rosemond (1990), and Sonna (1990) all agree that homework is the child's responsibility and should be completed by the child.

Homework is an established school tradition. The student expects to receive homework assignments. Parents expect their child to have homework and become suspect about the teacher and whether learning is taking place when homework is not assigned. Homework, in the mind of the parent, is evidence of learning taking place. Parents rely on this type of connection between themselves and school (O'Donnell, 1985).

The idea behind homework is to reinforce those skills taught in the classroom and to develop attitudes that lead to improved behaviors (Rosemond, 1990). Studies made in 1983 (Suydam, 1985) show that math achievement is increased when homework is given and rewards the learner with additional opportunities for learning to take place.

Homework is not a popular activity with any student. Most all students dislike doing homework (Glasser, 1990). It is a tiresome task; it prevents

leisure-time activity, and teachers have a tendency to give an overabundance of academic assignments (Cooper, 1989).

Almost every child can learn the responsibilities of doing homework (Sonna, 1990). This responsibility should belong to children and not to their parents. Homework is meant to teach children behaviors that will enable them to become more independent. It gives them a certain autonomy in their own thinking and allows them to take charge of something they can do for themselves. These behaviors are not fostered in many homes and can become contributing factors as to why homework is not completed in many settings (Rosemond, 1990).

Children in elementary school are exposed to homework as early as kindergarten, when parents are expected to give considerable guidance. This guidance continues through grades one and two. As the child's level of understanding grows, the work becomes more complicated. The child has learned to lean on the parent for support and help. The more dependent the child remains the more difficult it is to adopt behaviors that will encourage independent thinking. Children need motivations that lead to the discovery that they are responsible for their own actions (Canter & Hausner, 1987).

Society has also contributed to the problem. The many changes that parents have had to make in this

community have placed a tremendous drain on the time and energy of family members, leaving them tired and exhausted (Sonna, 1990). Some parents are so stressed because of external pressures that they are rendered incapable of helping their children (Smilansky, 1990). These people do not have the time or desire to deal with children's problems.

Other families become overly involved. They interpret good parenting skills with becoming so involved in the child's life they do not give the child the necessary room to grow and develop. This involvement is a risk factor that produces anxiety and causes guilt about the child (Rosemond, 1990). Guilt forces parents into situations that adversely affect homework completion (Quasius et al., 1984).

Many parents feel that homework should be a family affair and often become active participants. These well-meaning parents often do much of the homework themselves. Homework sessions are usually accompanied by nagging, negative comments and anger between parent and child. The parent sees him/herself reflected in the child's academic progress and transfers feelings of frustration and anger to the child. Parents often use punishment to alleviate feelings of inadequacy.

This school community has seen a great increase in Hispanic immigration. Many parents have no skills in language proficiency in either Spanish or English.

There are at least twelve families in this class in which no English is spoken except by the children at school. Spanish-language television is the main source of input from the outside world. These families become segregated into a society in which they do not need to know English in order to function. This is frustrating to a child who needs to ask a question about spelling, vocabulary or directions in English. English written material - books, magazines, newspapers, etc. - is rarely available.

The dissolution of the nuclear family has had considerable impact on children and adults. Single parents actively pursuing careers or other activities are not home to supervise children. They are unable to monitor their child's progress involving schoolwork. Left in the care of baby sitters or grandparents, a suitable environment for homework completion is not provided. Absentee parents disassociate themselves from the child's world and responsibilities concerning school (McCormick, 1990). All of these factors which contribute to a child's problem with homework completion need to be addressed in a fresh, innovative manner by the teacher.

A problem exists with communication, which is an important link between home and school (Canter & Hausner, 1987). The responsibility for positive communication rests with the teacher (Rosemond, 1990).

Parents who suspect there is a problem are often unwilling to confront it. They perceive criticism as a personal attack on their parenting skills or as an insult to their intelligence.

It is the writer's experience that non-English-speakers feel threatened when confronted with situations that have not been a part of their cultural heritage. Many of these families have had their lives uprooted, have had to leave familiar places and family in search of a safer and better life. They have had to make considerable adjustments in their economic, intellectual and emotional lives. These people should not be asked to take on another burden of responsibility such as homework (Smilansky, 1990).

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was to resolve the homework dilemma and encourage children to take responsibility for completing their homework. Meeting this goal would enable the students to practice skills that were taught in the classroom and provide them with the reinforcement they needed for mastery in basic skills. Encouraging parents to share in the success of the student would foster positive home/school communication.

Behavioral Objectives

The following objectives were identified:

1. Twenty-three of twenty-six students will take responsibility for completing homework assignments within an allotted period of time.
2. Twenty-three students will complete the homework in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher.
3. The students will work in group situations and use the library when necessary.
4. Students will communicate with their parents by letting them know that homework had been completed.
5. Parents will be asked to sign the completed papers

indicating that they had seen the homework.

6. The teacher will communicate with the parents in a positive manner concerning the child's homework completion.

7. Children will benefit from the reinforcement and practice of skills by improving their scores on weekly tests. Higher test scores will reflect learned skills.

Measurement of Objectives

Objectives were measured in the following way:

1. Each day children were asked whether or not they had their homework. The children who completed their assignments received a check after their name on a tabulation chart. This signified satisfactory progress. Children who failed to do the assignment received an I, which indicated an incomplete grade.

2. The teacher supervised the initial period for task completion. Instructions were clearly stated, a sample was placed on the board for children to follow. Library time was used for reference work in spelling vocabulary.

3. Careful observation by the teacher showed that during the allotted time each child worked within the group, completing the assignments.

4. After the homework was completed each student placed the work in a specific folder and took the folder home

to show the parent.

5. Parents signed the completed homework to show that they had examined the work. The papers were placed back in the folder and returned to school the following day.

6. Check lists, initiated by the teacher, were sent home every two weeks to indicate that the homework was being completed on a regular basis. Notations were made if this was not happening.

7. Tests were given at the end of each instructional week in order to ascertain whether basic skills were reaching mastery level.

Mechanism For Recording Unexpected Events

Unexpected events included those events that would prevent children from doing their work within the confines of the classroom. These included days when special activities took place, such as field trips, Field Day, Career Day or other events that would interrupt the regular classroom schedule. Homework assignments on these special days were carried over to the following day's activities and were used as a review by the students.

Description of Plans for Analyzing Solution

A wall chart for homework completion was kept on a daily basis. It was posted so that children were able to keep pace with how well they were doing. The goal was to complete all the homework that was assigned daily. The children were not in competition with each other. They seemed eager to improve themselves and encouraged others to do the same.

Scores from tests given in spelling and math were kept on distribution graphs, also posted. The graphs were kept for a twelve-week period or until the culmination of the practicum. These scores would reflect the degree of skill comprehension and the level of achievement.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Careful observation by the writer showed that by mid-year the children in this class were not completing their homework on a regular basis. Boys and girls would arrive at school with partially completed papers or no work at all. Excuses for the incomplete assignments varied, but each excuse appeared to be part of an established pattern of behavior going back over a long period of time.

Experts in the field of education all seem to agree that homework should play a vital role in the school curriculum. Assigning homework supports the theory that it gives the student additional opportunities for learning to take place (Suydam, 1985). It is supposed to reinforce the learning that takes place in the classroom. Teachers are expected to give homework assignments on a nightly basis. Parents and children expect this to happen and accept it as a normal condition of going to school.

However, homework also has its negative side and many children do not like to do the assignments because they are boring, take time away from leisure-time activities and repeat the same activity done for many hours in the classroom (Cooper, 1989).

By definition homework consists of assignments that children are expected to carry out during non-school hours. The name implies a separation from the activity that is carried on in school under the teacher's supervision. Many teachers are careful to point out to parents the value of completing these assignments at home. They encourage parents to become involved by helping their children and by checking their papers after the assignments have been completed.

A plan was formulated which included teacher, student and parent involvement in solving the homework dilemma. This plan provided children with a way to complete their homework during the school day in the regular classroom, using a variety of strategies designed by the practicum writer. These included self-management techniques combined with a time schedule that allowed for cooperative grouping. The homework policy was now being changed to allow for the completion of assignments before the child left school at the end of the day. This plan was outlined and fully implemented by using the following methods.

Every two weeks, corrected papers, which included both homework and classwork, were sent home to parents. These were accompanied with a check list that stated whether or not children were completing their assignments. This check list included the teacher's comments about the child's behavior during school hours.

At the bottom of the page, weekly test scores were given to parents so they could monitor the progress of their child.

Parents were requested to sign the check list and return it to the teacher. It was then placed in a personal, confidential student file. This file, along with other samples of the child's work, was used during parent/teacher conferences. This method of keeping track of children's work habits, homework completion and test information was not required by school policy. However, this teacher found it of great value in keeping parents informed of their child's progress and helpful to the teacher during conferences.

When questions arose over children's progress it was easy to look back and review week-by-week what had happened and how it had affected performance. Upon careful examination of the check lists, it was noted that those children who consistently came to school without their assignments had lower grades on weekly tests than those who came with assignments completed.

When it was observed that a child was having difficulty completing assignments or experiencing difficulty with controlling behavior, parents were requested to come to school for a conference.

Description and Justification For Solution Selected

What part did the teacher play in this scenario? What was the child's role? The problem always came back to the child and what responsibility was his.

Canter (1987), Sonna (1990), and Rosemond (1990) all agree that homework is the responsibility of the student and not that of the parent or the teacher. In other words, the student must develop behaviors that will contribute to task completion.

Parents are often unaware of techniques that can be used to help teach these behaviors. The need to establish firm guide lines, objective attitudes, and consistent patterns of behavior on their part are necessary to the solution of this particular problem (Rosemond, 1990). Unfortunately, parents are not equipped with a handbook that tells them how to do this. Children are not born into the world with a set of instructions for care and handling.

For long-term growth and development children need to become independent in their approach to their own responsibilities. Children need to develop good self-esteem, become good time-managers and learn how to set goals for themselves. They need to be taught how to make decisions and solve their own problems. These attitudes can only be taught through consistent

paradigms in an environment that is conducive to task completion. That environment is the classroom (Smilansky, 1990).

No innovative solutions other than the one selected were encountered in the research of the literature. One solution was to motivate children by giving them exciting things to do (Quasius et al., 1984). Another was to simply succumb to the problem and eliminate homework altogether (Suydam, 1985). This was hardly a solution.

Another suggestion was to enlist the aid of the parent in providing such a positive homework environment that children would rush to their room eager to begin their task (Canter & Hausner, 1987). Problem documentation by this author showed that in the current setting of this school parents would be unwilling or unable to cooperate within this ambiguous expectation (Smilansky, 1990).

For this project, assignments were designed to allow the student ample time to complete them. A time frame was suggested to let the student know when the work should be completed. If an assignment was made in class before 11:00 A.M., it was reasonable to expect the work to be completed by 2:30 P.M. Completed work was placed in a special folder which was taken home for the parent to review, sign, and discuss with the student. Absent students could make up the work on their own

time.

Classwork time and homework assignments were restructured in order to accommodate the new system. A sample of classwork was given to students so it could be determined whether or not the assignment was understood. Homework assignments were never lengthy but included activities that would be fun and sometimes challenging.

The new procedure was explained to parents in a cover letter which was sent home prior to beginning this new method of homework completion. Suggestions were offered to parents who wished to be involved. Many parents took comfort in knowing that something was expected of them and felt better when they could take an active part. Their signature was the communication between home and school. Comments were encouraged.

Each day the children would come to school, ready to begin the challenge of learning new material. School began at 8:30 in the morning. After the announcements and the attendance, housekeeping chores such as pencil sharpening and unpacking of bookbags, would take place.

The children were seated in groups of six. Each group had a team leader, chosen by the children themselves. The job was rotated on a weekly basis. Being a team leader permitted each child the opportunity to take a leadership role. Letting the children select their own team leader gave them a chance to practice democratic action within the classroom. At the end of

the nine-week grading period, all of the groups were changed. This allowed children to work with different classmates, enabling them to make new friends and work with different types of learners.

The teacher would begin each lesson by introducing the new work. In math the children were given twenty minutes to work practice problems on the board. The children who were not at the board would work the problems at their seats. All the problems were checked for accuracy. If a child was having difficulty he was permitted to take a friend to the board with him. This created a non-threatening atmosphere and made it fun to go to the board with a friend.

After the practice problems were solved, the children were asked to do a minimum of fifteen problems at their seats. This was to make certain the children knew how to do the work. The teacher walked around the room observing the children at work in their groups. The children were permitted to work together to solve the problems. This cooperative grouping got the slow ones working and those who were still having difficulty were able to get additional help.

After the classwork was completed, it was placed in a tray, checked the following day by students from a different group, and then returned to the children. At the end of classwork time, the team leaders would pass out the homework and children were given time to

work on their homework until the next subject. If the homework was not completed during this allotted time, the children could take it to lunch if they wished.

The same type of activity was repeated during spelling. Instruction was given; a practice session was initiated and classwork was assigned. Classwork usually took twenty minutes and homework followed the classwork.

If the homework was not finished in the initial time provided, a half-hour at the end of the day was set aside so that children could complete their assignments before 2:30. Those who had managed their time well, who had gone right to work and completed their tasks, could at this time read any book they wished, go to the library, write a story or do a fun activity in math, reading or spelling. Finished homework was placed in the homework folder to take home for parental inspection and signature.

In the beginning, teacher direction was necessary. After the second week, children took over the role of director and became self-initiating. It was very interesting to watch. An observer entering the classroom could see children at work, helping one another, moving around the room in a purposeful manner and taking care of business.

At the end of each week, a test was given in math and in spelling to see if mastery of skills had taken place. Those children who continued to have problems in

certain subject areas found benefit in a peer tutoring project which incorporated cooperative learning techniques. Students and parents also knew that they could do additional school work at home, using the suggested materials sent home with the cover letter.

This program placed the responsibility for homework completion on the students, with the establishment of a new system for them to work in. As a result, students were now successfully completing their lessons within the specified period of time. They were also able to use their teacher as a resource for immediate feedback and to use the library more often. Learning better time-management skills provided each child with the additional benefits of more time for practice of skill building and more time for reading for pleasure.

As the program progressed, children felt increasingly better about themselves and their accomplishments. This carried over to their home environment as well. Communication between parent, child and teacher became easier and took on a more positive tone, which aided the implementation process and created a pleasant environment.

Report of Action Taken

February 19, 1991.

A cover letter was sent home informing parents of the new homework policy. This was accompanied by a list of suggestions as to how parents could use this policy at home to become more involved in their child's school work. Included with this information was the regular checklist of weekly pupil progress.

In the classroom the children were introduced to the new homework program. They were told that when the program began all assignments would be made in the morning and would be completed in class during the day. All finished homework would be due by 2:30 in the afternoon. Regular lessons would be taught as usual, but in order to provide the additional time necessary for homework completion, the lessons would be somewhat shorter than what the children were used to.

The children expressed amazement and delight with the idea of no homework out of school. They asked many questions and a complete discussion followed.

Month 1

Week 1 February 25 - March 1.

This was the first day of the implementation period. Homework folders were distributed to each child early in the morning. It was explained that all

completed homework would be placed in these folders. The folder was to be taken home at the end of the day and shown to the parent. The parent would examine the work and sign to show that it had been seen. The complete folder was to be returned to class the following day. On Friday, March 1, the students were given their weekly tests in math and spelling.

Week 2 March 4 - March 8.

Parents and students were encouraged to make comments and suggestions as the program continued. These comments provided a basis for implementing any changes or additions which were deemed necessary. The weekly test in math and spelling was administered on March 8.

Week 3 March 11 - March 15.

The bimonthly report was sent home on March 11. By this time it seemed that students were making progress in planning their time more effectively. Students were beginning to take the initiative for their own work, making teacher-direction less necessary. The weekly tests were administered on Friday.

Week 4 March 18 - March 22.

The monthly test was given at the end of this week. Monthly tests covered more extensive mastery of math and

spelling skills. Results of this test clearly showed an improvement in learning of skills.

Week 5 March 25 - March 28

The implementation period continued. Bimonthly reports were sent home on the 25th. The week ended on Thursday, March 28, and there were no children in school on Friday. Evaluation was done on Thursday.

Month 2

Week 6 April 1 - April 4.

This week marked the end of the grading period. Testing took place on the 4th. April 5th was a teacher workday with no children in school and it also marked the beginning of spring break which lasted from April 8 to April 12.

Week 7 April 15 - April 19.

The bimonthly report was sent home on April 15, as the implementation period continued. The weekly test was given on April 19. Improvement continued as shown by test results.

Week 8 April 22 - April 26.

The monthly comprehensive test was given on Friday. By this time it had become evident that children were using their class time more effectively,

thereby allowing them more free time. This produced an unexpected bonus. Students began reading more library books and using the library more frequently. They were also cooperating more within their groups.

Month 3

Week 9 April 29 - May 3.

The bimonthly report went home on April 29. The teacher and the children were now referring to the posted tabulation chart to determine progress compared to the first and second months of the program. All but three of the children showed marked improvement.

Week 10 May 6 - May 10.

The weekly test was given on May 10. As the practicum progressed the children became more aware of each other as individuals. The teacher observed a more caring attitude beginning to emerge. Friendships flourished and children displayed greater respect for one another's remarks and advice.

Week 11 May 13 - May 17.

The bimonthly report went home May 13. The weekly test was given on Friday. Test scores in math and spelling indicated improved mastery of skills.

Week 12 May 20 - May 24.

The last comprehensive test was given on May 24. By this time, students were so pleased with their progress and their test scores that a noticeable difference in student attitude was evident. The time spent on reading for pleasure continued to increase. This had a positive effect on reading comprehension and classroom management.

Week 13 May 28 - May 31.

This was a makeup week for days missed due to teacher workdays and holidays. The bimonthly report went home May 28. The comments received from parents were favorable. Test scores had improved steadily over the implementation period.

The last weekly test was given on May 31. The formal implementation period was now complete, but due to the overwhelming approval of this innovative system by the students and their parents, it was decided to continue the program for the remainder of the year.

Chapter V

Results, Discussion, Recommendations and Dissemination

Results

The main goal of this practicum was to increase homework productivity in third grade through on-site supervision. The homework assignments were given to reinforce basic skills in spelling and math. Twenty third-grade students completed the homework in the specific time allotted by the teacher. This was accomplished during the class day. Because students were working in school they had the advantage of being able to use both their own teacher and the library as resources in the event they needed special help.

An additional goal was to have the student communicate with the parent. This was accomplished by having students place their homework in a special folder to take home. Parents would review the homework, sign the papers, and the folder was returned to school the next day.

Another goal was to have the teacher communicate with the parents in a positive manner. This was done by sending home check lists every two weeks. It was important to keep parents informed as to whether their child was improving by giving information about weekly test results. Parents were free to make comments on

the check lists, which were then filed in the child's personal record.

The child was able to benefit from reinforcement and practice of skills by making acceptable scores on the weekly tests. This supports the theory that reinforcement and practice of skills aids in mastery.

These objectives were achieved during the three-month implementation period by utilizing time management techniques, cooperative learning procedures, resource personnel and reference sources.

The primary goal of increasing homework productivity through on-site supervision was quite successful. The secondary goal, that of establishing better communication between parent and teacher and parent and child, was equally successful. The tertiary goal was to improve learning in the basic skills. Although this goal was partially successful it fell short of the expectations of this writer.

Discussion

The children in this particular third-grade class were delighted with the idea of doing their homework in school. To them it meant freedom from the repetition of tasks performed in school five days a week. It gave the children an opportunity to enjoy a social life with friends and family and to do leisure-time reading.

It also solved the problem of how to get help if they should need it. The many families who spoke no English and did not own encyclopedias or dictionaries were very happy with the arrangement. Because the math system in the United States is different from the one taught in most Hispanic countries, those parents who were unable to help their children before were relieved that on-site support was now available.

Thirty minutes of class time each day were assigned to homework completion. Many children were so eager to get started that they would take their homework to lunch and use some of their lunch time working, helping others or reading.

At home, children spent more time reading library books. Library circulation had increased and more books were going home each day. This was an unexpected but welcome outcome because it had a major impact on the reading program.

Cooperative learning centers were established in order to facilitate homework completion. This involved children working together in small groups where they helped each other with specific tasks. Children who were having difficulty mastering spelling words were able to help each other by taking practice tests. Others who were experiencing difficulty with math found that a peer tutor was a good teacher.

This type of learning produced another unexpected

bonus. The students developed a rapport with each other that developed into mutual respect. Friendships flourished and the children began to treat each other and their teacher with more respect.

It was difficult to decide who was more pleased with the practicum: the child, the parent or the teacher. Parents were grateful for being relieved of the burden of helping with the homework crunch. In another classroom a parent informed his child's fourth-grade teacher that he wanted his child transferred into the class where homework was being done in school. The teacher had to explain to the parent that it could not be done since the class in question was a third grade.

The check lists were also successful because parents were kept apprised of the child's progress every two weeks. Parents felt free to comment on the check lists as they were returned to the teacher. Many parents wrote positive comments while others expressed their satisfaction in person. One parent commented that this was the first time she had encountered this type of interest from a teacher. Not one parent complained of a lack of communication. Parents appreciated knowing when improvement was needed in a subject or when improvement had been made.

Parent conferences were positive in nature. The check lists had furnished them with complete information about the child's progress from week to week allowing

the parent to see how improvement was being made. Children as well as parents shared a feeling of well-being because they were improving in their school work. Children who were having difficulty knew they could ask for and receive help during the homework period.

It was interesting that children showed remarkable progress in the first month of the practicum only to make a decided drop in the second month. However, progress was again evident in the final phase. The reason for this could have been the relative difficulty of the subjects being taught.

During the second month, in math, division with a remainder and long division were introduced for the first time. These were difficult concepts for many children to grasp and instruction had to be repeated several times during the month. With the additional classroom help, the children were soon successful in learning how to divide with a remainder.

Spelling also took a decline in the second month because the words became increasingly difficult. On weekly tests children were now being asked to write dictated sentences along with their own creative sentences. The children were now responsible for mastery of weekly words as well as words from previous lessons.

This writer was satisfied that the practicum was successful. The stated goals had been met, producing

Analysis of grades in spelling and math on a monthly basis.

Table 1

Spelling Grades	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Total
A	46	35	40	121
B	27	25	22	74
C	10	13	13	36
D	6	9	14	29
F	2	8	2	12

Note. Grade distribution in spelling for each month.

Table 2

Math Grades	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Total
A	42	25	46	131
B	25	13	17	55
C	10	18	14	42
D	7	15	13	35
F	8	18	2	28

Note. Grade distribution in math for each month.

the expected results as well as some additional outcomes that improved learning and social interaction.

Recommendations

Elements in education are slow to change. Technology has just begun to make an impact on learning even though it has made significant changes in other fields such as business and banking. For years, academicians have been studying learning styles in order to facilitate learning, but schools in general have been slow in incorporating these well-researched learning styles into the classroom.

For many years teachers have assigned homework as a matter of course. Some of it has been needless and used for the sole purpose of creating extra work to keep students occupied. Some creative teachers have learned how to make homework an exciting part of the educational experience. Innovative strategies would be a welcome addition in any classroom where the current system is dysfunctional.

Educators speak of paradigm shifts or of changing models. However, teachers have continued using the same ineffective systems because they lacked alternative solutions. A perfect place to introduce a paradigm shift could be the area of traditional homework assignments.

When this practicum was described to a group of educators it received a great deal of criticism. Homework was supposed to be done at home; that is why it is called homework. This comment was repeated by many, who voiced strong resistance to altering a well-established system. Some traditions are so entrenched that change is hard to envision.

What difference does it make if the child does the work at home or in school? If the child benefits from the practice and the reinforcement, does it matter in what location work is done? If we rename it leisure-time work or classroom-reinforcement, would that make a difference? Semantics seem to play an important role in teacher/parent thinking.

The family of today has undergone many changes. New immigrants arrive at our shores everyday. In many communities English is rarely spoken in the home. In many households there is only one parent. In many two-parent households it is very common for both parents to work.

These changes are evident yet they are often not addressed. Teachers continue to fault parents because they do not involve themselves with homework. When a parent is unable to communicate in the language of the school or when he is so tired or burdened with his own problems, he cannot become involved. According to Smilansky (1990), it is incumbent upon the teacher to

help children with homework and not expect the parent to do the job.

The strategies outlined in this practicum will be repeated in future classes because an important lesson was learned by this writer. Children made significant growth in learning, social interaction, completing tasks and achieving goals as a result of the methods successfully implemented here.

Technology will allow us to go beyond the classroom walls. Learning is not confined to classrooms nor is the institution of homework constrained to remain fixed forever. If we are to make the necessary paradigm shifts then we must be willing to rethink established systems that do not work.

Other teachers have shown a willingness to try this new approach to the homework dilemma. It takes just a little restructuring by the teacher to pare down the amount of classwork, in order to accommodate the time factor for homework completion.

Freeing children from the restraints of homework allows them the opportunity to spend quality time with their parents, and offers them the time to engage in leisure reading or other pursuits. It also eliminates the guilt over homework, thus bringing parent and child closer together without the pressure created by school.

Dissemination

This practicum made a difference in how children increased their homework productivity. However, the idea of changing a well-established system was viewed with suspicion by many of the teachers in this school. Although other teachers appeared to be interested in the development and conclusions of this work, it will be some time before they will feel secure in assigning homework on-site.

As the population of the community continues to change it will also be necessary for teachers to effect change. Parents were vocal in their approval and children were the ones who benefitted greatly.

The writer has written an article, "Haggling Over Homework: The Crisis Continues," with the hope of having it published, so that other educators will reevaluate their thinking about homework and how effective it is in fostering independence and self-esteem in children.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO PARENTS

ENGLISH AND SPANISH

December 1990

Dear Parents,

At the present time I am attending graduate school and plan on a doctorate degree in education. As part of my field work I must present an existing problem and solve it.

The problem that has been targeted is one that involves homework completion. In solving this problem it will shift the responsibility to the child and will relieve parents of the stress and hassle of dealing with homework.

However, Your cooperation in this undertaking is very important. I am requesting that you fill out the attached form, sign it and return it to me as soon as possible.

Everything that I do as a student helps me to become a more effective teacher for your child. I appreciate your help and support in this venture.

Sincerely,

Myra S. Locke

Myra S. Locke

Diciembre, 1990.

Queridos Padres:

En estos momentos me encuentro asistiendo a la universidad, en la escuela de estudios graduados, y planeo conseguir un doctorado en educación. Como parte de mi trabajo necesito presentar un problema existente en la actualidad y tratar de resolverlo.

El problema que se me ha adjudicado involucra tareas escolares y cómo completarlas. Para resolver este problema la responsabilidad debe adjudicársele a los niños, ésto aliviará a los padres de todos los problemas y tensiones involucrados en las tareas escolares.

Su cooperación en este problema es muy importante. Le pido que complete el cuestionario adjunto, fírmelo y regrésemelo lo más pronto posible.

Todo lo que yo hago como estudiante, me ayuda a convertirme en una profesora más eficiente para sus hijos. Agradezco, de antemano, su ayuda y apoyo en este proyecto.

Sinceramente,

Myra S. Locke

APPENDIX B

PARENTS SURVEY OF THE PROBLEM

ENGLISH AND SPANISH

Please check one answer for each question.

	YES	NO
1. Are you comfortable working with your child in the English language?	____	____
2. Is it an effort to get your child to do his homework each night?	____	____
3. Does your child put off doing the work?	____	____
4. Does he/she forget books or the assignment?	____	____
5. Do you have a quiet place for homework to be done?	____	____
6. Does your child have a specific time set aside for homework.	____	____
7. Do you help your child with homework?	____	____
8. Does your child spend more then 30 minutes a night on homework?	____	____
9. Does your child spend less then 30 minutes on homework?	____	____
10. Do you check the homework after it has been completed?	____	____
11. Do you listen to your child read on a regular basis?	____	____
12. Do you read to your child?	____	____
13. Do you make weekly visits to the library?	____	____
14. Do you desire help with the homework?	____	____

Por favor, chequee una respuesta por cada pregunta.

		SI	NO
1.	¿Se siente cómodo trabajando con sus hijos en Inglés?	--	--
2.	¿ Le cuesta mucho trabajo que sus hijos hagan su tarea cada noche?	--	--
3.	¿Busca excusas su hijo para no hacer sus tareas?	--	--
4.	¿Olvida su hijo los libros o las tareas asignadas?	--	--
5.	¿Tiene su hijo un lugar tranquilo donde puede hacer sus tareas?	--	--
6.	¿Tiene su hijo una hora específica y determinada para hacer sus tareas?	--	--
7.	¿Le ayuda usted a su hijo con sus tareas?	--	--
8.	¿Tarda su hijo más de 30 minutos, cada noche, haciendo tareas?	--	--
9.	¿Tarda su hijo menos de 30 minutos, cada noche, haciendo tareas?	--	--
10.	¿Después de terminadas las tareas, las revisa usted?	--	--
11.	¿Escucha usted leer a su hijo, regularmente?	--	--
12.	¿Le lee usted a su hijo?	--	--
13.	¿Visita usted, semanalmente, la biblioteca?	--	--
14.	¿Desea usted ayudar con las tareas?	--	--

_____

Firma

APPENDIX C

RESULTS OF SURVEY

SURVEY RESULTS

	Yes	No
1. Are you comfortable working with your child in the English language?	15	8
2. Is it an effort to get your child to do his homework each night?	9	14
3. Does your child put off doing the work?	11	12
4. Does he/she forget books or the assignment?	7	16
5. Do you have a quiet place for homework to be done?	20	3
6. Does your child have a specific time set aside for homework.	14	9
7. Do you help your child with homework?	16	7
8. Does your child spend more then 30 minutes a night on homework?	15	8
9. Does your child spend less then 30 minutes on homework?	6	17
10. Do you check the homework after it has been completed?	12	11
11. Do you listen to your child read on a regular basis?	8	15
12. Do you read to your child?	5	18
13. Do you make weekly visits to the library?	9	14
14. Do you desire help with the homework?	17	6

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARENTS

February 19, 1991

Dear Parents,

On Monday, February 25, our class will initiate a new policy concerning homework. This is an outgrowth of the survey that was sent to you in December.

Homework will continue to be assigned but will be completed in the classroom. Children will be able to work together, use the library and reference material which is provided by the school. I will serve as a resource person.

When the homework has been completed it will be placed in a folder for your inspection and signature. Please replace it in the folder and return it to school the next day.

This is an attempt to motivate your child to develop behaviors, that will lead to independent thinking and to develop self reliance. It will also provide him/her with the ground work for good decision making and problem solving. It will serve as a guideline for completing homework in the future.

Many of you may be interested in being an active partner in this program, therefore, I am furnishing you with a list of suggestions of how you may accomplish this.

Thank you for your continued support and cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 221-5632.

Sincerely yours,

Myra S. Locke

Signature_____

APPENDIX E

SUGGESTIONS TO PARENTS FOR HELPING CHILDREN

ENGLISH AND SPANISH

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD BECOME
A BETTER STUDENT

1. Continue to make weekly visits to the library. If you have not been doing this it is not too late to start.

2. Arrange for your child to read for at least thirty minutes each night. Just before bed may be a good time. It allows for relaxation and winding down after a full day.

3. Read to your child in English or your native language.

4. Review the weekly spelling list.

5. Review the multiplication tables.

6. Give sample problems in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in order to keep skills sharp.

7. Talk to your child about what you have done during the day and encourage him/her to talk to you about what he does in school.

8. Make television a selective event and watch it with your child. Share thoughts about the program.

9. Encourage your child to share feelings and problems. It might help for you to share yours with the child.

SUGERENCIAS PARA AYUDAR SU NIÑO HACERSE UN ESTUDIANTE MEJOR

1. Continúe hacer visitas semanales a la biblioteca. Si usted no ha hecho esto, no es demasiado tarde para comenzar.

2. Asegurese que su niño lea por lo menos treinta minutos cada noche. Antes de acostarse seria un tiempo bueno. Esta actividad permite el descanso después de un día lleno.

3. Leale a su niño en Inglés o en su lengua.

4. Repase la lista semanal de ortografía.

5. Repase las tablas de multiplicación.

6. Dé problemas de muestra en sumar, restar, multiplicar y división para repasar las destrezas importantes.

7. Hablele a su niño sobre lo que usted ha hecho durante el día y anime al niño a hablar sobre lo que él hace en la escuela.

8. Haga televisión un acontecimiento escogedor y mire la televisión con su niño. Comparta pensamientos sobre el programa.

9. Anime a su niño a compartir sus pensamietos y problemas. Puede ayudar a su niño compartiendo sus pensamientos con el.

APPENDIX F

BIMONTHLY REPORT TO PARENTS

ENGLISH AND SPANISH

NOTE TO PARENTS
NOTA A LOS PADRES

WEEK BEGINNING:_____
SEMANA: del_____a_____

HOMEWORK
TAREA

Completed and returned homework daily
Completo y entrego sus tareas cada dia.

Many incomplete assignments -- will stay after school on _____ to make up homework.
Muchas tareas incompletas. Tiene que quedarse en la escuela despues de clases para terminar la tarea.

BEHAVIOR
COMPORTAMIENTO

- ☐ Excellent
  Excellente
- ☐ Good
  Bueno
- ☐ O.K., could be better
  Satisfactorio, puede mejorar
- ☐ Unsatisfactory
  No Satisfactorio

Needs improvement in:
Necesita mejorar en:

- ☐ self - control
  controlarse
- ☐ excessive talking
  habla demasiado
- ☐ shouting in class
  grita en clase
- ☐ staying in seat
  permanecer sentado
- ☐ working silently
  trabajar en silencio

WORK HABITS
HABITOS DE TRABAJO

- ☐ Usually completes work to the best of his/her ability.
  Generalmente termina su trabajo lo mejor que puede.
- ☐ Stays on task and uses work-time efficiently.
  Trabaja con dedicacion y usa el tiempo eficazmente.
- ☐ Needs to slow down and try harder to do his/her best.
  Necesita calmarse y tratar de trabajar mejor.
- ☐ Has trouble completing assignments because of poor work habits (example: too much talking and playing during work time).
  Tiene problemas para completar sus tareas debido a que tiene malos habitos de trabajo (ejemplo: a la hora de trabajar se pone a hablar y a jugar).